

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Cherokee Nation Industries

Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance

Cherokee Nation Industries Builds Partnership, Grows Business

Client Profile:

Cherokee Nation Industries (CNI), established in 1969, operates as a government contractor in the aerospace and defense sector, including the production of wire harnesses for certain aircraft. CNI employs 250 people at its manufacturing facility in Stilwell, Oklahoma.

Situation:

CNI had bid on a multi-million dollar project which was rejected and shared the experience with Connie Cunningham, a manufacturing extension agent with the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance, a NIST-MEP network affiliate. Cunningham in turn had conversations with Jeff Cochran, an agent with the Alabama Technology Network (ATN), a NIST MEP network affiliate, regarding a similar bid from an Alabama-based manufacturer. The Alabama manufacturer, EDO-CAS, provides service throughout the Department of Defense, specializing in the full spectrum of weapons systems support. The MEP field agents quickly realized that some of the components utilized by EDO-CAS, such as certain wiring, could be produced by CNI. A thorough technology-needs assessment further revealed that expertise related to sheet metal fabrication was a capability CNI did not possess but wanted to acquire to meet its strategic goals. EDO-CAS had both the knowledge and equipment. CNI and EDO-CAS realized a partnership could help both companies be more competitive. The companies decided to enroll in the Department of Defense's Mentor-Protégé program. The program assists small businesses (Protégés) to successfully compete for prime contract and subcontract awards by partnering with large companies (Mentors) under individual, project-based agreements.

Solution:

Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance worked with CNI on a project involving a large wiring harness for military helicopters. CNI identified a few areas where they could reduce production time by using Lean techniques. With Cunningham's assistance, CNI broke down the process piece-by-piece and made it more efficient, improving production time by 58 percent and reducing production line travel by 96 percent. "Cherokee Nation Industries was able to take a project that had been a concern and, with help, turn that concern into a successful effort," Cunningham said. "They empowered the workforce to make the improvements and it worked. In fact, they are now using those Lean concepts on smaller harness projects." With the help of 5S and Kanban systems, various components were placed in easy-to-find order. These changes have created time savings, increasing opportunities for business. For instance, in an area where two major harnesses are used in aircraft assembly, CNI increased work efficiency by more than 25 percent. "It was amazing," said Cunningham. "They went through six weeks of Lean implementation. They dissected it, broke it down and got input from the frontline people. That's the greatness of Cherokee Nation Industries."

Results:

www.mep.nist.gov



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- * Increased production time by 58 percent.
- * Reduced travel time by 96 percent.
- * Improved efficiency by more than 25 percent.

Testimonial:

"I am so happy we contacted the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance. Lean is a never-ending journey and in most cases requires a total change in management philosophy. The Alliance is there to lend advice every step of the way."

Brian Morris, Director of Manufacturing